

by architect Helmut Jahn with all the trusses on the outside to keep the views unobstructed on the inside. In classic 1970s fashion, what was supposed to be a stirring sight, a fifty-foot-tall, 1,500-pound inflated elephant set to soar high above the arena, drooped flaccidly in the parking lot, its stomach accidentally punctured by its rigging. Inside, in air-conditioned splendor, delegates enjoyed unobstructed views, at the convention's only daytime session, of spectacles like the Tennessee congressman offering his dramatic reading of the lyrics of the Johnny Cash song "Ragged Old Flag," the presentation of a ceremonial gavel to the local industrialist after whom the arena was named, the interminable reading out of roll calls and rules, speech after speech by obscurities like the chairmen of the National Black Republican Council and the Republican National Hispanic Assembly and the chairman of the College Republican National Committee—a kid named Karl Rove, who said students' "allegiance will be won only by the intelligence and soundness of our issues and the quality of our candidates."

Peaceful so far.

Then the evening session. "I know you will all share my enthusiasm and pleasure over this next announcement," said RNC chairman Mary Smith. "Princess Pale Moon, the beautiful Cherokee Indian, who sang the National Anthem, will entertain us once again. She will sing the brand-new patriotic selection, which was written by Will Rose. This is the first time that this selection has ever been heard in public. If you will watch carefully, you will find that Princess Pale Moon will interpret the lyrics with beautiful Indian dance movements."

Texans, down on the floor in matching red-white-and-blue cowboy hats, were fidgety, waiting for something to happen. "I want to skin Dan Rather," their chairman, Ray Barnhart, told *Texas Monthly's* reporter (who backhandedly complimented him for his "unqualifiedly handsome face and a patina of good breeding") about something the CBS newsmen had said about their delegation being ready to give up on Reagan. "You know one of the problems with a thing like this is all of a sudden you hear a rumor and—zoom!—it's a reality." Perhaps the person in his delegation who started the spontaneous demonstration for Reagan overheard him, and decided to prove Dan Rather wrong. The delegation revived an old ritual conservatives had begun at the 1964 convention—the conservative Woodstock, some called it. The Texans on the convention floor turned to the Texans clustered together up above them in the arena's raked seating—the gallery—and cried "Viva!"

The gallery answered back: "Olé!"

Directly between them, as it happened, were the Ford fam-

ily's box seats. And it was at precisely that moment that Betty Ford—accompanied by her son Jack, the one who had tried marijuana, and her son Steve, the one who was studying stockyard management, and who wore a cowboy hat—appeared at one of the openings into the arena. Every Ford supporter in the house applauded. But Betty didn't make her move to the family box behind the boisterous Texas delegation; instead she milked the reaction. Maureen Reagan, a sharp political operative herself, saw what was happening: the convention managers had held the Fords' arrival for the moment when they could dampen the first show of enthusiasm for Reagan. Michael Reagan was about to escort his stepmother down to their seats. Maureen held them back, got the attention of the California delegation, signaled madly with her arms—and got them restarted on another round of "Viva!" and "Olé!" with the Texans all the way on the other side of the arena. She recorded the political triumph in her memoirs: "Thinking this signaled Nancy's arrival, Betty Ford made her entrance. We quieted the crowd as best we could and allowed the Ford delegates to cheer Betty's arrival. She seemed thrilled, thinking she had cut short the welcome intended for Nancy," and sat down in the family box.

Then Maureen had her mother walk in.

The reception was staggering. The band, as it had been instructed to do when Nancy Reagan arrived, struck up "California, Here I Come," chorus after chorus. *Time*, which hadn't even noticed Betty's entrance ("Nancy made the first move"; the band had goofed, and gave Betty no welcoming song), called her "a stunning study in red." And the Reaganites could not get enough.

Mary Smith: "Ladies and gentlemen, may we please have your help, please, so that we can go on with our agenda."

More earsplitting din.

"We love the enthusiasm. We appreciate your spirit. Will you please come to order!"

But there was no order.

"May I have your help please!"

Finally, after fifteen minutes, the noise began to die down. "I can look up from the back row of the Texas delegation," the *Monthly's* reporter wrote, "and see the underside of Betty Ford's chin"; she looked "calm, regal, arrogant." Then, sheathed in an aquamarine dress, Betty swept her arms high to the crowd. But the response from her supporters could not silence the Reagan throngs. She had been upstaged.

The convention script that night had been written to maximize com-
munity. But there was none. The governor of Illinois charged that Reagan

Old rivals spoke: Nelson Rockefeller, joking about his sixteen years trying and failing to get the Republican nomination; Barry Goldwater, who'd denied him in 1964, hailing "two of the best candidates ever to come before a convention," calling upon the crowd "to pick one, and then . . . work, work, work to elect him" over "Mr. Carter and his warped idea of what this country is about." But when Rockefeller began, a journalist said, "the convention's enthusiasm pull[ed] back like a tide." The public address system failed for a moment; Rockefeller later fumed that Dick Cheney must have pulled the plug. As for Goldwater, as he made his way to the podium, slowly, on crutches from a knee infection (he hadn't even wanted to show up), the word "sellout!" rang out in the great hall. Afterward, in an interview, he sounded like Dr. Frankenstein surveying the work of his monster. His former supporters now working for Reagan, he said, were "some of the most vicious people I have ever known. If you waver an inch they call and write and say you're a dirty s.o.b."

Goldwater was gulping bourbon. He told his interviewer, "Reagan has become one of those people, the really ideological ones who won't change."

THE MISSISSIPPI DELEGATION, STILL UNCOMMITTED, STILL THE KEYSTONE of either side's victory, would still be a thirty-vote bloc—unless they voted to undo their unit rule, which was a possibility, too. Reagan operatives reminding him of his conservatism, and Ford operatives reminding him of their pledge to him, trailed Clarke Reed like shadows, wheedling him, humoring him, threatening him. Reporters trailed him, too—at first to his evident delight, and then, as the pressure closed in, to his growing discomfort. Monday morning at the Muehlebach Hotel, Truman's Midwestern White House and the convention headquarters hotel, while shopping in the men's clothing store, Reed had told one journalist he was taking a "good, hard look at 16-C" as a means of pressuring Ford to name a conservative running mate. Someone relayed to Ford's Southern chief, Harry Dent: "Better watch Clarke, he's flipping." Charlie Pickering, the conservative who was to succeed Reed as state chairman, announced his switch from Reagan to uncommitted—though Pickering, smarter than Reed, did it as a maneuver to move other un-

Mike Wallace shoved a microphone into Reed's face on the floor early Monday afternoon. Ford's Mississippi floor whip, Jack Lee, in a red baseball cap (Ford state whips wore red caps so they could easily be identified at a distance during the fast-moving chaos of a contested vote; "floating" whips, who moved between delegations, wore yellow), thought he overheard Reed say he planned to vote for 16-C on the floor the next night—maybe even (hard to tell; convention floors were noisy) lead the fight for the Reagan amendment. Lee pushed a button on an electronic console: a code red that went straight to the Ford trailer. Harry Dent ambushed Reed later in his room at the Ramada East Hotel. "What are you doing in the world you doing to us!"

"Clarke, my goodness, what in the world you doing to us!"

"Whattaya mean, whattaya mean, cat?"

"You just told Mike Wallace on CBS you gonna lead the fight and deliver thirty votes for Rule 16-C."

Reed, overwhelmed by the pressure, flopped, exhausted, onto his bed. "Oh my God! What can I do? What can I do?" (He was getting some pretty nasty letters from Ronald Reagan fans, calling him a scumbag and worse; maybe that had something to do with it.)

What he could do, Dent firmly advised him, was honor his pledge to the man in possession of the nation's nuclear codes.

"I gotta get out of this! I gotta get out of this!" answered poor Clarke Reed, his rather pathetic attempt to cast himself as the Mark Hanna of the 1976 Republican Party plainly reaching the end of the line.

Back in the arena, under the red Mississippi standard, Dent and Reagan's leader in the delegation, Billy Mounger, were toe-to-toe, throwing hot words at one another, Dent arguing that the delegation was so divided they should hold a formal caucus to vote on its will. Other key players joined the scrum; like iron filings drawn to a magnet, reporters pulled toward them to listen in. The Magnolia State Republicans' twenty-nine-year-old executive director, Haley Barbour, belted out the

names of Mississippi's eighty-two counties in backward alphabetical order, Yazoo to Adams, to safeguard the privacy of the deliberations. It didn't work; the screaming was too loud. Moulton to Dent: "You're not a member of this delegation! We don't want a vote!" Dent to Moulton: "I know why you don't want a vote! We've got the votes and you don't!"

Princess Pale Moon made beautiful Indian dance movements. Four Mississippi Republican leaders and a White House official from South Carolina found a dark warren behind some bunting to crouch beneath and continue deliberating to find some mutually agreeable procedure to determine the fate of the delegation to determine the fate of the convention to determine whether it would be Ronald Reagan or Gerald Ford to face Jimmy Carter in the fall. Pat Boone, meanwhile, worked over a black female minister, Jean Long of Gulfport, Mississippi, who'd declared for Ford after visiting with him on July 30. The Christian conservative crooner persuaded her to visit Reagan's suite. There, Reagan turned her around. After which, according to Ford's daily diary preserved at the National Archives, she heard out the president once more. Recorded Jules Witcover, "Nobody knew whose nose count was right by now."

The gavel sounded, closing the first evening's session. At that, the Texas contingent joined forces with Reagan's twenty-nine delegates in the Michigan delegation and charged through a Ford cocktail party in a sunken pit of the Crown Center Hotel lobby chanting, "We want Reagan! We want Reagan!" with hands outstretched in the "hook 'em horns" gesture, encircling the traitors, who joined the battle themselves:

"Ford can win! Ford can win!"

"We're against Ford! We're against Ford!"

Grown men and women. The custodians of a major American political party. "The pandemonium," *Texas Monthly* reported, "is total."

TUESDAY MORNING. ALL OVER THE TRAFFIC-JAMMED TOWN, EACH SIDE was tearing down and ripping up the other's posters. Two teams of young supporters, "Youth for Reagan" and "The Presidentials," like homecoming football game rivals, lined the driveways of both campaigns' headquarters hotels, cheering and booing and beaming and glowering at motorcades accompanied by police cruisers in the ninety-degree heat.

Open the papers: "REAGAN DELEGATES TURN ON THEIR MAN" was the headline of a UPI article about conservative opposition to 16-C. Con-

servatives were unimpressed with the argument of Mary McGrory that "John Sears had saved Reagan the fate of being labeled another Goldwater," who "won the nomination in 1964 with the help of right-wing fanatics and hit-men." A conservative spokesman was quoted, though whether he meant Sears or Sears's candidate went unspecified: "He can go to hell. . . . In the bottom half of the ninth inning here they come with a Mickey Mouse proposal."

Jack Anderson reported on the doings of Richard Nixon: "His memoirs, according to sources who have been in touch with him, will reassert the President's right to steal and wiretap and rig court cases in the national interest." And of Spiro Agnew, who'd raised thousands in donations from conservatives including Joseph Coors, William Rusher, John Wayne, and Ronald Reagan for a nonprofit, "according to associates, to assert his views and assail his enemies. He is particularly eager, the associates say, to renew his assaults upon the press." A *New York Times* feature alerted the nation to the importance of one Phyllis Schlafly, "who introduces herself as a lawyer's wife from Alton, Ill., and the mother of six, a correct but incomplete description. . . . A blonde with deep blue eyes, a figure that can still be called willowy, and a winning smile," she was also author of "two book-length tracts, *Kissinger on the Couch*"—actually more than ordinary book length; it was 846 pages—"and, hot off the presses, *Ambush at Vladivostok*."

The *Times* also profiled one of her adversaries, Elisabeth "Betsy" Griffin of the Republican Women's Task Force. "Tall and blond and—to repeat an adjective because once again it applies—glamorous," Griffin was quoted as mocking Schlafly's claim that ERA was an attack on "homemakers": "I know perfectly well that Phyllis Schlafly has domestic help to scrub her kitchen floors. I scrub my own kitchen floors. Some day we can compare dishpan hands." It continued, "Miss Griffin, who is married to John Deardourff, a political consultant who specializes in moderate Republicans, made it a point to bring her wedding ring, which she doesn't normally wear." (The *Times* didn't mention Griffin's profession: she was headmistress of a prestigious private school.)

"Do you hate men?" a delegate asked her.

"Can't you tell I'm pregnant?" she replied. "I have a lovely husband who supports the Equal Rights Amendment."

But this fight was just one of the sideshows. Turn on the TV, and the *Today* show starred the only delegates who now seemed to matter—the ones from Mississippi who were uncommitted. They were talking about the only issue that seemed to matter. "The energy, in these pre-16-C

hours, is intense," *Texas Monthly's* man observed. "You can sense the desperation with which the caucus drives off intimations of defeat." Ray Barnhart: "I'm reminded that according to all the experts Ronald Reagan didn't have a chance. Well, I'm afraid that some of our pollsters along with some of our politicians just don't understand people."

Maybe so. Strategists on both sides had been agonizing over whether to lobby Mississippi to dissolve its unit rule. First the president's man James Baker decided a split vote would advantage Ford; then he changed his mind and decided to go for the all-or-nothing bloc. "How many other Clarke Reeds might there be out there," a historian later imagined him thinking, "telling him one thing and doing another?"

The two sides agreed that the crucial delegates would gather for a 3 P.M. caucus at their hotel, to vote first on the unit rule, and then on 16-C. The media assembled, noses veritably pressed behind one of those banquet room sliding doors. A limousine pulled up. John Connally, a true larger-than-life personage—*Texas Monthly's* reporter said you could feel the force of his handshakes ten feet away; "your digits are empathetically crushed"—stepped out. Ford's trial balloon of him as a running mate had deflated when nine Ford delegates from Maine threatened to abstain on the first ballot if the Watergate-tainted Texan's name was put forward. "From my point of view John Connally represents the power politics of the Sixties," said Maine congressman William Cohen, one of the impeachers on the Judiciary Committee. "I think it's an era that has gone by." He pointed to an infamous March 23, 1971, Nixon tape—Connally had briefed the president about exactly what dairy lobbyists were demanding in exchange for a political donation—as something "the American people would no longer tolerate." Garry Wills, though, had a great riff in his newspaper column: "He is the only candidate," he said, referencing Connally's miraculous acquittal in that milk-bribery case, "who can prove he is not a crook—after all, the jury said he was not." And the man himself never seemed to recognize there was anything to be ashamed of. *Texas Monthly's* reporter said, "He looks like a man who is confidently awaiting a time when the presidency itself will be conferred by natural selection."

Upon his arrival at Mississippi's motel, Connally was pulled into the room of Haley Barbour. Connally emerged, but not into the caucus to ply the delegates for Ford as expected; Charlie Pickering, the Reagan man pretending to be uncommitted, observed that and showed no emotion; Dent, observing Pickering, was heard by a reporter saying with apparent elation to Connally, "Governor, that means we got the vote." There were four or more layers of possible poker bluffs to decipher

here—whether Connally was sent away because his presence would hurt Ford, because Mississippians had grown resentful at heavy-handed White House tactics, or whether Connally was sent away to make it appear his presence would hurt Ford, because Barbour was for Reagan; whether Pickering was showing a poker face; whether Dent was sincerely expressing his confidence or making it appear to a powerful man that he was confident—and, beneath all the intrigue, who knew? Harry Dent entered the conference room, apparently to make the case for Ford.

Reagan showed up and entered the conference room. "How Haley Barbour left the room. "They voted?" Dent asked him. "How did they vote?"

They had voted to keep the unit rule and, by three votes with one abstention, to vote their delegation as a bloc against 16-C—for, by inference, Gerald Ford. The word flashed across Kansas City that it just might be over, and the stampede to Ford could begin. Coincidentally, CBS News reported that for the first time since it had begun counting, Ford was over the top with 1,132 "firm or committed" delegates. The Reaganites at the Ramada streamed to the hotel pool, where they had hoped to enjoy a victory party. The cases of beer had been sent over with the compliments of conservative benefactor Joseph Coors. They flipped them open and drowned their sorrows before the evening's full-convention debates and votes over the platform and the rules.

IT WASN'T OVER, NOT NECESSARILY. BY THE SAME MONDAY DEADLINE that the feminist abortion supporters had also been racing to meet, the Reagan campaign filed its anti-Kissinger minority report, a plank to be tacked on to the platform's existing language and titled "Morality in Foreign Policy." It began—

"The goal of Republican foreign policy is the achievement of liberty under law and a just and lasting peace in the world. The principles by which we act to achieve peace and to protect the interests of the United States must merit the restored confidence of our people. We recognize and commend that great beacon of human courage and morality, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, for his compelling message that we must face the world with no illusions about the nature of tyranny. Ours will be a foreign policy that keeps this in mind."

—and that couldn't have been a more frontal attack against the president who had so conspicuously refused to meet with Solzhenitsyn during his summer 1975 visit to the United States. It continued, "Ours will be a foreign policy which recognizes that in international negotiations

coordinating the din. Dole tried again: "I remember in 1972 in Miami, when I was chairman of the Republican Party, the most exciting event was taking the official photograph. But I can see from this audience and from the enthusiasm here that you may have other things in mind. . . . If all of the alternates and delegates would look toward the CBS anchor booth on the right, and if you can refrain from moving or speaking photograph. . . ."

And, finally, they did: one more 1970s family picture of forced grins occluding seething resentment and rage; or maybe they didn't. The *Official Report of the Proceedings of the Thirty-First Republican National Convention* did not include an official photograph of the floor.

IT WAS TIME; THE MOMENT HAD COME. ("WE ARE ABOUT TO PROCEED with very historic business," implored Senator Dole, once more begging the delegates to return to their seats. "I wouldn't want you to miss this.") A delegate from Missouri, U.S. representative Thomas B. Curtis, introduced the 16-C amendment for the Reagan campaign. He read out its dry, legalistic language ("No delegate or alternate to the convention shall be bound by any commitment of any kind, public or private, to support any presidential candidate who does not file such a declaration. . . ."), and suddenly the din rose again. "I would only ask that you listen to me for about thirty seconds," Bob Dole cried—but this was not to be. Betty Ford entered the building, and the Ford supporters went wild.

Then, moments later, Nancy Reagan entered. The band struck up "California, Here I Come." She made her way up to the family box, a glass aerie at the far end of the hall more than two hundred feet from the stage, and the cacophony grew and grew—bigger than Betty's. Nancy was winning.

Then the first lady pulled a virtual ace from her evening gown sleeve.

A certain song was sounding in the background, courtesy of the house band: "Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round the Ole Oak Tree," the best-selling record of 1973. Its singer was the vaguely Latino, mustachioed Tony Orlando, who starred every Wednesday night on CBS on his own slightly racy variety show (beginning the next month it would open with a five-minute monologue by George Carlin)—a Ford supporter. Presently Orlando himself appeared, and pulled Betty into the aisle, and they delighted (about half) the crowd with a spirited dance.

Time called it "The Contest of the Queens": "a battle in red and aqua, a regal contest between the strikingly handsome, radiantly smil-

ing wives of the Presidential candidates at either end of the convention hall." *Time* interviewed Betty, whom it declared the winner, and who insulted Ronald Reagan: "He is a good speaker, he comes across well on TV—after all, that was his trade. . . . Jerry Ford is not fluff; he knows the meat-and-potatoes part." Betty insulted Nancy Reagan, too: "I just think that when Nancy met Ronnie, that was it as far as her own life was concerned. She just fell apart at the seams." And she gave her political analysis: "Personally, I think it should have been uncontested. Jerry has done such a good job in the past two years. The fight is very bad, very bad for the parties; it has built up animosities." Indeed, *Time* also interviewed Nancy, who gave as good as she got: "It was just Ron and a handful of staff against the tremendous power of the other side." ("Though her smoothly modulated voice never wavered, her hurt came through.") "I've never known the White House to be used by either party the way it was in this campaign. The White House stands for something. I don't think it should be concerned about uncommitted delegates." And, in fine family form, she denied she'd even noticed the Tuesday night fuss: "I'm nearsighted. I couldn't see the other end of the hall."

The dance routine had been choreographed, of course—planned for the moment of maximal political import, the 16-C debate. Bill Carruthers, the Ford campaign's audiovisual coordinator (or as NBC called him, Ford's "cosmetic advance man"; he'd been in charge of things in the previous administration like making sure Nixon didn't look "jowly"), and George Murphy, the former senator and movie musical song-and-dance man, came up with the idea after the first lady's humiliation the previous night; the band was to treat Nancy's arrival as its cue to launch into "Tie a Yellow Ribbon." Vic Gold of the *Washingtonian*, whose sources within the world of political public relations were unmatched, explained how "the media was measuring crowd enthusiasm for the wives in gauging crowd enthusiasm for Ford-Reagan delegate strength." So "Carruthers and Murphy called in show business reinforcements." They did their job well. *Newsweek* was among the outlets who described the Orlando gambol as "spontaneous." Knowing his side had been licked, Ray Barnhart, the chief delegate from Texas—who'd led the stampede of the previous evening's Gerald Ford hotel-lobby cocktail party—told reporters, "I thought it was in very bad taste."

REPRESENTATIVE CURTIS HAD TO READ THROUGH THE AMENDMENT again; no one could possibly have heard it the first time around. He finished and yielded the microphone to a testy Bob Dole: "I would ask that the aisles be cleared! . . . Will the sergeant at arms please cooperate,

or will the media please cooperate? ... All those in the aisle on my right, all those in the aisle on my left, we want to get on with this very important business. ... The delegates have a right to be heard. ... Would the sergeant at arms please clear the aisles? We will have order before we proceed!" He rapped his gavel like a demonic woodpecker.

There was next to be a half hour of debate over 16-C. The two sides alternated speeches of two minutes, each choosing ordinary delegates to deliver its message. The Reagan side spoke against type in the civic abstractions of reformers like Common Cause: "a binding, moral commitment to the principles of openness, full disclosure, and complete trust in the American people"; "tell us who is on the team before asking us to join it"; "Haven't we had enough backroom decisions for the vice presidency?" Ford delegates spoke of "the political mistake of naming Senator Schweiker" and "desperation and blatant political opportunism" and the "wedge of division in our party" it would produce. Passions were absurdly high. A Reagan precinct worker from California finished up to such barking enthusiasm that Dole appeared to be scared: "Those on both sides have a right to be heard. ... Everyone who walks up here is nervous to begin with. Don't frighten us any more." Sherry Martschink, the delegate from South Carolina who became a national celebrity for her quips about former dentist Governor James Edwards, began a labored metaphor about changing the rules in the middle of a game of checkers, and was vociferously booed. A Ford delegate from Arkansas said that because 16-C would exclude Reagan from vice presidential consideration, it "disenfranchises me and disenfranchises you"—and the Reaganite outburst that followed the ugly word *disenfranchise* was so unceasing that Dole said he worried 16-C's deadline for naming a running mate would come (at nine the next morning) before the roll call on it concluded—

He paused, looking out at a commotion on the floor.
"Will the sergeant at arms please try to clear the aisle on the right one more time, and will the delegates from New York please be seated?"
He conferred with someone.
"There is something wrong with the telephone. They can't hear the phone ringing."

They couldn't hear the telephone connected to the Ford command trailer because it had been ripped out of the floor.

The vice president of the United States had spotted a Mormon preacher from Utah who'd invaded the space of the New York delegation and was bearing a "Reagan Country" sign. "With an adolescent grin

on his face," said *Texas Monthly*, Rockefeller snatched the offending sign from the minister's hands.

Conservatives recognized that adolescent grin. It was the same simpering expression Rockefeller had worn in 1964, speaking from the convention podium in San Francisco about the "radical well-financed minority" taking over the Republican Party—when he was booed, and the crowd started chanting "We want Barry!" He simpered arrogantly then, too, muttering, "That's right, that's right"—relishing the opportunity to display just how uncivil the right-wing opposition truly was. However, this time the incivility started with him. It proceeded to escalate. The Utah Reagan leader, Douglas Bischoff, chased after Rockefeller to retrieve his placard. He and New York GOP chairman Rosie Rosenbaum scuffled. Rockefeller claimed to have overheard someone say "if he didn't get that sign back he was going to rip out the phone"—and presently, the white phone connecting the New York delegation to the Ford command trailer in the parking lot was indeed ripped out while the chairman held the receiver to his ear, surrounded by a crush of reporters attempting to overhear him.

"I want that man arrested!" Rosenbaum yelled as Bischoff attempted unsuccessfully to scuttle down an aisle ahead of the Secret Service agents, who apprehended him for questioning beneath the stands. "He ripped my phone out. That's what Reagan people are like."

Rockefeller held up the severed phone for the cameras, sweat breaking through his dress shirt. He then gave the sign back to a Reagan delegate—after ripping it in half.

The American flag on the stage fell over.

New York and North Carolina delegates, whose standards were next to one another on the floor, issued catcalls at one another, waving fists, making threats.

Dole, at the podium, was livid. He admonished the crowd, then America's richest man directly like he was a naughty schoolboy: "Ladies and gentlemen—Mr. Vice President!—ladies and gentlemen, delegates, please take your seats." "The usual aplomb of the Vice President of the United States," Ray Barnhart sneered, standing next to a microphone, ready to announce a hundred Texas votes for 16-C. When Rockefeller exited the floor, Secret Service agents had to surround him. New York delegates chanted angrily; "We want a phone! We want a phone!"

Just about the only person who was calm through the entire thing was Ronald Reagan. He watched it on television in his hotel suite, dissolving in laughter. Then, he saw a televised image of himself on televi-

A PANIC SHOT THROUGH THE FORD SKYBOX: JIM BAKER HANDED HARRY Dent a copy of the *Birmingham News* with the headline, "Ford Would Write Off the Cotton South," which was apparently circulating through the Mississippi delegation they thought they'd sewn up. This was the sort of lightning-fast development

But the alphabet only forestalled the inevitable. "For the benefit of the cameras," the *Texas Monthly's* man wrote, Barnhart and his deputies keeping track of the 16-C roll call tally sheets "manage tight, cheerless smiles." Texas was called—"one hundred principled votes for 'aye'!"—

The process, which was supposed to take an hour or so at most on the schedule, was over. The convention rules were adopted unanimously. There were a few more desultory speeches, and then the meeting moved to the question of the platform—at more than an hour past midnight Central Standard Time.

Millicent Fenwick tried to get recognition to call a roll-call vote on the question; the feminists wanted their adversaries on the record on national television. But that could be politically embarrassing for the president. The rules allowed a roll call by written request, which Fenwick sought recognition to present. But Arizona congressman John Rhodes, who had spelled Dole as chairman, said time had expired, and wouldn't

call on her. "A phalanx of people surrounded him," Melich wrote, "and several strong-armed men blocked our page from giving him Fenwick's note." Rhodes called a voice vote; Melich thought she heard her side's "ayes" as having been overwhelming. Not the chair, though. The language of the platform draft would stand: It called for "public dialogue on abortion"—but also endorsed a "constitutional amendment to restore protection of the right to life for unborn children."

However, that was a development of interest mostly to history. Once more the abortion fight got little coverage. Either outcome of it would have had no bearing on the question that mattered most: who would the Republicans nominate? And despite the 16-C outcome, the Reagan camp nurtured hope for the big prize. Their "Morality in Foreign Policy" plank was up for debate next. Gerald Ford would surely never allow his darling Henry Kissinger to be humiliated like this. And *that*, surely, would be their dagger. That was obvious enough when no one in Kansas City spotted "Henry the K" at any of the glamorous cocktail parties upon which the nation's most unlikely sex symbol so doted. He was under "political house arrest," people said. Ford knew how politically toxic Kissinger remained for the vast majority of Republicans, so he was damned if he did, damned if he didn't: Lose the debate for a Reaganite plank, and surely many delegates would stampede for Reagan in tomorrow's nomination roll call. Win the debate—well, even then, that would just show how committed to détente's sellout of America the accidental president truly was.

This could get interesting. The people who'd managed to stick around through these early A.M. hours, on TV and in Kemper Arena, were at least guaranteed one more good fight.

But in the Ford skybox, the chief of staff was making an aggressive argument.

Richard Bruce Cheney of Casper, Wyoming, had begun his Washington career in 1969 at the age of twenty-eight interning in the office of moderate congressman William Steiger from Wisconsin, having dropped out of a doctoral program in political science at the university in Madison. In the Nixon White House he apprenticed himself to another moderate, Donald Rumsfeld, who headed Nixon's Office of Economic Opportunity; Cheney then followed Rumsfeld to the Ford White House, first as chief of staff, then (after Rumsfeld engineered the "Halloween Massacre") as secretary of defense. Cheney's defining passion in Ford's White House was his rage at Congress's Watergate-era assertion of power against the executive branch and the national security state. One of his ideas had been to appoint Robert Bork, the for-

mer acting attorney general who'd fired Archibald Cox, as the new CIA director ("a strong team player," Rumsfeld called him). Another was to burglarize Seymour Hersh's apartment for his exposés on the CIA. He'd also been the most aggressive advocate for a White House meeting with Solzhenitsyn. Like his mentor Rumsfeld he was a masterful bureaucratic infighter, which was how, after taking Rumsfeld's place as chief of staff in the Halloween Massacre, he had managed to also insinuate himself now, in effect, as Ford's campaign manager. From that perch he argued to the candidate that the platforms didn't mean anything; he should just swallow the "Morality in Foreign Policy" plank because if he fought it the nomination might slip out of his grasp.

Cheney's arguments, in other words, were tactical, though Cheney's goals, surely, were also ideological. If Rumsfeld had moved right only gradually (under Nixon he'd recommended unilateral withdrawal from Vietnam), his student Cheney had been a right-winger all along. He loved the plank in itself.

Ford yielded to Cheney's argument. They called no witnesses in opposition to the Reagan amendment. Voice vote; the ayes had it. Which was how, by the time weary delegates were finally able to go to bed, in addition to becoming the first American party to go on the record against abortion they were now the first to revile détente. Jim Lake, Reagan's press secretary, later reflected that they should have made its language stronger—"an outright sock in the jaw." James Baker said that would have been the right play: make it two words, "fire Kissinger," and the football just might have been tipped.

IT DID NOT. WEDNESDAY, A DAY FOR HEADLINES LIKE "EVENT DEGENERATES to Chaos" (the *Milwaukee Sentinel*), and also for faits accomplis. Grassroots Reagan activists refused to believe it. One group tried to drum up an eleventh-hour firing of John Sears in favor of Lyn Nofziger. After what their Boswell called "a tearful locker room scene... that lasted until 4 A.M.," a cohort of Texans made a pilgrimage to the governor's suite in order to ask him to dump Schweiker. One of the emissaries reported, "Governor Reagan came out and before we could even get started, he shut us down real quick. 'If you could... guarantee me the nomination, I still wouldn't do it.' And that made us all feel really small for even attempting it." *Wall Street Journal* writer Jude Wanniski plied Peter Hannaford with his "Two Santa Clauses" theory—that if a Republican president radically lowered taxes, economic growth would somehow magically skyrocket, and Democrats who opposed lowering taxes would become villains and be voted out of office—and said that

Jack Kemp, the New York congressman and former pro football player whom he'd turned into a supporter of the idea, would switch from Ford to Reagan if the Californian backed massive tax cuts, too. Hannaford looked at Wanniski as if he was crazy, and walked away.

And there was one fait not yet accompli, thanks to the failure of 16-C: who would be Gerald Ford's running mate? That morning the *New York Times* reported the speculation was down to William Ruckelshaus and Howard Baker, two names to remove the sting from Jimmy Carter's "Nixon-Ford administration" thrusts. Then word emerged that Baker's wife, Joy, had been hospitalized for alcoholism, and this, according to the prejudices of the day, removed him from consideration. Touts were still floating the names of liberals, but one of them, William Warren Scranton, had taken over the stop-Goldwater baton from Nelson Rockefeller and was just about equally despised. Pick wrong, and angry conservatives could abandon Ford in droves for the general election; he wasn't going to take chances. His deputies were negotiating with their all-but-vanquished foes about a postnomination meeting between the two principals.

The *Texas Monthly*'s reporter headed up in the hills behind the war memorial, where it was said the hippies were camping. He found "kids skinny dipping in the fountains and running naked in the grass. Teenage girls are guzzling bottles of Coronado wine and singing 'Cocaine don't make me lazy.'" He approached a fellow, who, too wary to talk, suggested he introduce himself to "Marijuana Mike, who is something of a leader. . . . Marijuana Mike has only one tooth, a long festering stalactite occasionally visible in the cave-like darkness of his empty mouth." Mike told the reporter—after a detour for a joint—"We are now on the grounds some four hundred non-delegates to the un-convention for the election of Nobody."

The reporter looked around: five or six tents, clusters gathered around cooking fires, "thirty non-delegates at most."

Marijuana Mike told him that if enough people voted for "Nobody" the election would deadlock, throwing it into the Electoral College. The reporter asked him what good that would do: "Oh, man." He turns away in disgust and mutters something about a kangaroo and a carcinogenic civilization."

The dregs of the 1960s: nothing much for worried Republican masters to fear.

The nominating convention session began. Signs: ROCKY DON'T STEAL THIS SIGN; SEND FORD TO HELSINKI, SEND REAGAN TO WASHINGTON.

TON; PRESIDENT REAGAN '77. The Texans added kazoos to their arsenals. "I'm very, very hopeful," an alternate from Fort Worth said. "I'm just hoping for Reagan to pull it out." A delegate told the *Texas Monthly* reporter, against all evident reality, "It's going to be close." Another alternate, from Waco, told the reporter, like one of the hippies up in the hills, "Right now, right now I just feel there's an inherent goodness and goodwill in the world."

The first speaker, Governor Arch Moore of West Virginia, finished—and the chairman had to complain, "May we have order, please? There will be time for tooting of horns and other noisemakers later on, but this is not the time. We have important business to conduct."

The next speaker, a Michigan congressman—then the chairman: "Ladies and gentlemen, will you please take your seats? Time for demonstrations has not yet arrived. We still have business to perform."

Not likely. The next speaker, Jacob Javits, was among the figures most hated by the right. This time the interruption began almost immediately, drowning him out. The band had taken to playing "God Bless America" between speakers, sheer patriotic reverence having some effect in goading the noisy and noisome conservatives to surcease. This time the musicians had to start the song during Javits's oration—and it didn't have any effect. A Sousa march: nothing. So the Ford family was cued for an entrance, to the strains of the University of Michigan fight song, "The Victors." "One way to overcome noise," Jules Witcover explained, "is with more noise." But the impromptu Reagan demonstrators were proving unstoppable. So the band threw them a bone, peeling forth with "California, Here I Come"—as with overtired children, maybe one last spurt of hyperactivity would work.

Nope. One more "God Bless America," but hundreds of razzing kazoos swarmed over the song. This noise to no political purpose was starting to scare people: 1964 again.

Another Sousa march, another "Victors." Nancy entered, to another "California, Here I Come," as Javits tried to break through, with liberal bromides about "human vicissitudes and human catastrophes" and how "headlines don't cry the tears of individual hurt and individual need" and "real people with real problems."

Two more rounds of "God Bless America." Fans of the incumbent waved their arms, crying "Ford! Ford! Ford!" Elizabeth Drew of the *New Yorker* struggled with herself, dropping objectivity, outing herself—"we"—as a partisan, an enemy of passion itself: "We tend to think this is OK because we think Ford is OK, safe. But what are the real dis-

inctions among political emotions? Some of the most menacing political figures in the history of the world have used stadiums and bands to whip up their followers." John Rhodes had had it, too, hurling the ultimate insult: "May we please quit acting like a Democratic convention?" At which, finally, business proceeded. A ceremonial roll call, then Paul Laxalt took the microphone, a year and a month after unveiling "Friends of Ronald Reagan" to a nonplused crowd of skeptical journalists at the National Press Club (an event that had made only page nineteen of the *New York Times*), to place into nomination "the finest Republican candidate that has hit a Republican convention in recent years: Ronald Reagan!"

EVERY FOUR YEARS THE PARTIES PUBLISH A BOUND VOLUME OF THE OFFICIAL proceedings of their national conventions, with every utterance made from the podium transcribed. Dreary, somnolent volumes that convey only the most austere sense of what these silly, cacophonous fiestas are actually like; exclamation points never make it into these records, and only the barest indications are offered about anything that happens that isn't what someone says into the microphone on the stage. In *Official Report of the Proceedings of the Thirty-First Republican National Convention Held in Kansas City, Missouri, August 16, 17, 18, 19, 1976*, for example, after Laxalt's speech for Reagan, the following words appeared, in parentheses: "(A great demonstration followed this speech, lasting approximately thirty minutes.)"

Some scenes not captured by those bare words: A middle-aged man with glasses, wearing a Reagan boater, observed by Mary McGrory standing "precariously with a leg on each arm of his chair in the gallery, holding a huge flag in one hand and a Reagan poster in the other. For the entire, ear-splitting forty-four minutes, he kept his position." (She reflected, "Nobody would have done that for Gerald Ford.")

The band, gamely trying to keep up with the crowd's energy, playing "California, Here I Come" and "Dixie" (Reagan was favored over Ford in the Southern delegations by a ratio of four to one) and "The Pennsylvania Polka" for Richard Schweiker. And then "Dixie" again—this song always "inspiring fresh frenzies," *Texas Monthly* observed.

Those infernal blue plastic horns, four feet long, droning away. Whenever the energy started to flag, the Texans began to cry *Viva!* and California answered back *Olé!*

Vival
Olé!
Vival
Olé!
Vival
Patti Davis was at home in Topanga, California, watching on TV, seeing "Ron, Michael, and Maureen in the box with my mother and Betsy Bloomingdale, their hairdresser Julius, and Jerry Zipkin," a real estate heir whose 1995 obituary described him as "a celebrated fixture on the international social scene for almost half a century. . . . He traveled widely with many female friends, and lunched with one or more on most days of the week, usually at Le Cirque or Mortimer's." Patti read her mother's face: "She knew my father had lost; she was angry, upset, and determined not to slink away unnoticed."

A young woman in one of the galleries wagging a hand-lettered sign, unceasingly, reading (*sic*) "CLARK REED IS ARNOLD BENEDICT." The taunts against Reed from Southerners grew so vicious that he had to slink off the floor, fearing violence.

Ford supporters in the balcony threw trash at the delegates from Texas.

John Rhodes let the energy ride for twenty minutes. Anxious Ford deputies, fretting that the madness would knock the president's nomination off prime time, cued the band to begin more rounds of "God Bless America" in a desperate attempt to cauterize the enthusiasm. Then, at thirty minutes, Rhodes began to glower. Reagan himself asked one of his staffers to make the demonstration stop. But his deputy answered back that there was nothing anyone could do to make it stop.

And then Rhodes tried something that might. "Fellow delegates, I am about to introduce to you a very distinguished citizen from the state of North Carolina to second the nomination of the Honorable Ronald Reagan for President of the United States."

It still didn't work. Rhodes continued his admonishments as Jesse Helms stood next to him at the podium. Rhodes handed the gavel to Helms; maybe that would prove he wasn't trying to sabotage Reagan. The band quieted, the lights went down—and still: nothing. Helms finally spoke. (Evans and Novak's review: "He seemed for a while to be nominating Alexander Solzhenitsyn.") But the convention was still out of control. Then, Mary McGrory observed a little cruelly, "The unexpected appearance of a black woman, Gloria Toote of New York, as a seconder, quieted them down." So did the nineteen seconding speeches

for Gerald Ford, which began at twenty minutes before midnight. The candidate of boredom. The candidate of calm. He got 1,187 votes on the roll call to 1,070 for Reagan; West Virginia put him over the top at 1:25 A.M. When the chairman moved to make it unanimous, Ray Barnardo of Texas, the guy who'd called Betty Ford's dance with Tony Orlando "bad taste," fought his way to the floor microphone and shouted, "No! No! No! No! No!"

A reporter made it down to Reagan headquarters, where staffers were packing boxes. A woman intoned into a pay phone: "Are you sure he wouldn't take the vice presidency? Can't we draft him? Are you sure?" Another told a friend, "This has been my life since October. I'd have done anything for him."

GERALD FORD ANNOUNCED HIS RUNNING MATE THE NEXT MORNING AT the Century Ballroom of the Crown Center Hotel. "I'm really thrilled with the opportunity of having Bob Dole as my running mate," he said. "Bob Dole will help to heal any divisiveness within the party." Ford looked tired. Perhaps Dole would perk things up. He was a slasher. *Time* printed some examples of his arch wit. (After Nixon offered to campaign for him in 1974: "I haven't invited him to stump for me, but I wouldn't mind if Nixon flew over the state.") And Dole was a conservative, which was why Gerald Ford chose him—so Ronald Reagan would sign off on him. Dole himself had half-expected to be picked by Reagan, and had even sent feelers to Lyn Nofziger regarding the job. He later described himself as having been "Schweikered." Later, sources revealed that Ford had wanted Ruckelshaus. But Reagan didn't want him—and that was that.

They had met during the previous night at 1:30 A.M., the winner, by prearrangement, calling upon the loser. A stipulation of the Reagan camp was that Ford not ask him to run. He had sent a handwritten note to the California delegation: "There is no circumstance whatsoever under which I would accept the nomination for Vice President. That is absolutely final." Claire Schweiker, the senator's wife, had tearfully told him, "Oh, Governor, I'm so sorry." Reagan embraced her: "Claire, you really shouldn't be upset about the outcome because it wasn't part of God's plan." He told his son Mike, "God chooses his own time." Then he went to meet with Ford, who shared his short list with him, and Reagan spoke highly of Ford. Reagan emerged and told his son, "He didn't ask me." However, when Jim Baker was his White House chief of staff in 1982, Reagan told him that he would have taken the running mate spot if Ford had offered it. God might choose his own time, but Ronald

Reagan always had a taste for being called to a rescue. And it's always nice to be asked.

The Reagans walked into a gathering of some two hundred staffers and supporters, he in a dark blue suit, she in white knit—"the entrance of royalty," Elizabeth Drew thought. Most of his audience was crying. Billy Mounger said he'd never cried so hard in his life. Even Nancy was crying (embarrassed, she turned her back to the cameras). Reagan opened, as usual, with a joke: "Backstage politics is like looking at civilization with its pants down." He acknowledged their tears: "Sure, there's disappointment in what happened, but the cause—the cause goes on."

Reagan, too, was fighting back tears. "It's just one battle in a long war, and it will go on as long as we all wage it. . . . The cause is still there." He quoted his favorite English ballad, from Dryden: "Though I am wounded, I am not slain; I shall rise and fight again." He promised he and Nancy "are not just going to go back and sit in a rocking chair and say, 'That's all for us'—and neither should you: 'Don't give up on your ideals. Don't get cynical. Look at yourself and realize all you were willing to do, and realize there are millions of Americans out there who feel as you do—who want it to be the shining city on the hill.'"

To his right, past the American flag, tears rolled down the cheek of a young man wearing a checked shirt. Reagan's voice caught, and he turned away, blinking back tears; his speech was finished. He had mentioned neither Gerald Ford, the upcoming fall campaign, nor the need for Republican unity.

A GIANT PAINTING OF GERALD FORD HUNG FROM THE CEILING FOR THE last session. A reporter thought it "depicted Ford's smile as a primate's sneer." The roll call of the states yielded 1,921 votes for Bob Dole and 338 for others, including Reagan, William F. Buckley, John Sears, William Simon, Reagan's young conservative staffer David Keene—and forty-one for Jesse Helms, whose name was officially placed in nomination by Bob Bauman. The move recalled a signal moment in conservative history. Barry Goldwater's name had been placed in nomination in 1960, allowing the Arizonan to give a speech refusing the honor, making a call to arms, and offering a promissory note—"Let's grow up, conservatives. If we want to take this party back, and I think we can someday, let's get back to work"—that was redeemed four years later in 1964. Bauman cited it: "Barry Goldwater stood at the rostrum in Chicago, and I, as a young member of the staff from the Maryland delegation, heard him tell me, 'Grow up conservative.'" Bauman continued, "We have

grown up. The fight here was between two groups of conservatives. And the conservatives will win this year in November."

This wasn't a bad argument, given the convention just past, which had ratified a pro-life, anti-détente, pro-gun, antibusing, pro-school-prayer platform, and had created the conditions that made nominating a liberal vice presidential candidate politically impossible. And now it was a convention in which Senator Jesse Helms had a prime-time televised speaking spot, and he was milking it for all it was worth:

What we do here . . . can be the prelude to a sort of spiritual rebirth across this land. The American people believe in God, and now is the time for us to show it.

The American people are worried about the forces in our society that seem to be tearing down the moral fabric of our nation, particularly as it is centered around the family, and they see government as threatening the moral order, and they are concerned about the secularization of education as though God didn't matter in the classroom. They are worried about the textbooks and the federal government's manipulation of the curriculum.

In other words, our platform, the one we adopted here this week, speaks to the concerns of the American people. . . . It is our covenant, it is our pledge, and we must live up to it."

The New Right had arrived. This wasn't Gerald Ford's show.

Cary Grant gave a tribute to Betty ("What is a party without remarkable women?"), who got the kind of ovation her husband never could. ("Thank you. And, Mr. Grant, I accept your nomination. After all, what woman could turn down Mr. Cary Grant?") A film showed the president looking presidential. (One shot had his back to the camera just like a famous image of JFK.) Ronald and Nancy Reagan stepped up to their skybox to hear Ford's acceptance speech and to receive one more uncontrollable demonstration. It had been a matter of resentment for the Reagan family that they were stuck behind glass, way up in the rafters, afraid it would make them look regal. Leave it to Dutch to figure out a way to make it a stage. He stood on his seat, so that his shoulders were above the top of the partition, and waved down to the crowd from up there. Elizabeth Drew recorded that the sound once more "[f]eeds on itself and grows, and then, after a while, the band plays 'God Bless America' and Ronald Reagan . . . and his wife stand and join the audience in singing the song that is intended to silence the cheers for him." Edwin Newman on NBC said that "were it not for Irving Berlin, this

convention might go on forever." John Chancellor said, "This is not a late-night movie, it only seems like one. The plot involves an accidental President who fought for his life in a very hard campaign against a former movie actor. The President is a kind of plodder."

For the plodder's acceptance speech, made in an old-fashioned banker's three-piece suit, the podium was switched out for one bearing the presidential seal:

"I am honored by your nomination, and I accept it with pride, with gratitude, and with a total will to win a great victory for the American people. We concede not a single state. . . . We concede not a single vote. . . . America is at peace. . . . This nation is sound; this nation is secure; this nation is on the march to full economic recovery and a better quality of life for all Americans."

He challenged Jimmy Carter to debate—this was newsworthy; there hadn't been a presidential debate since the first one, between Nixon and Kennedy in 1960—and the crowd cheered him: "We want Ford! We want Ford!"

He said, "After the scrimmages of the past few months, it really feels good to have Ron Reagan on the same side of the line." (Reagan waved, then clasped both hands above his head.)

Ford turned to the subject of August 9, 1974, when "I placed my hand on the Bible, which Betty held, and took the same constitutional oath that was administered to George Washington. I had faith in our people, our institutions, and in myself. 'My fellow Americans,' I said, 'our long national nightmare is over.' It was an hour in our history that troubled our minds and tore at our hearts. Anger and hatred had risen to dangerous levels, dividing friends and families. The polarization of our political order had aroused unworthy passions of reprisal and revenge. Our governmental system was closer to stalemate than at any time since Abraham Lincoln took the same oath of office. Our economy was in the throes of runaway inflation, taking us headlong into the worst recession since Franklin D. Roosevelt took the same oath."

He spoke, then, of a marble fireplace in the White House carved with a prayer written by John Adams. "It concludes, 'May none but honest and wise men rule under this roof.' Since I have resided in that historic house, I have tried to live by that prayer."

The president was able to boast of genuine recovery: inflation cut in half, payrolls and profits and production and purchases up. "This year more men and women have jobs than ever before in the history of the United States." He boasted, that, after "a decade of Congresses had shortchanged our global defenses"—Democratic Congresses, he need

not say—"and threatened our strategic posture... [t]he whole world watched and wondered where America was going. Did we in our domestic turmoil have the will, the stamina, and the unity to stand up for freedom?"

Take that, Ronald Reagan: America did. "Look at the record since August, two years ago. Today America is at peace and seeks peace for all nations. . . . The world now respects America's policy of peace through strength. The United States is again the confident leader of the free world."

Yes: "Two years ago people's confidence in their highest officials, to whom they had overwhelmingly entrusted power, had twice been shattered. Losing faith in the word of their elected leaders, Americans lost some of their own faith in themselves." And this: "From the start my administration has been open, candid, forthright." Even this Republican audience wasn't buying that, however; it got the least noise of any of his applause lines. They liked this: "Whether in the nation's capital or the state capital or city hall, private morality and public trust must go together." And they liked this implicit dig at his Democratic opponent, he of the jack-o'-lantern grin—"My record is one of specifics, not smiles"—even more.

Ford said, nodding at détente, "We will build a safer and saner world through patient negotiations and dependable arms agreements which reduce the danger of conflict and horror of thermonuclear war. While I am President, we will not return to a collision course that could reduce civilization to ashes."

He concluded: "I have no fear for the future of this great country." And he invoked the words of Lincoln: "As we go forward together, I promise you once more what I promised before: to uphold the Constitution, to do what is right as God gives me to see the right, and to do the very best I can for America. God help me, I won't let you down."

And the reviews said it was just about the best speech he'd ever given.

Jerry and Betty, arm in arm, acknowledged the cheers. Rockefeller and Robert and Elizabeth Dole, too, though more awkwardly. The band boomed "Marching Along Together."

Then Ford surprised the gathering.

By one account, Reagan was busy signing autographs in the mezzanine when an aide told him that Ford was beckoning him to the rostrum. The fact that few saw it coming was vouchsafed by the fact that Michael and Maureen Reagan had already left Kemper Arena and returned to the Alameda Plaza Hotel for another planned family dinner; Lyn Nofziger

hadn't bothered to go to the arena that night at all. Gerald Ford looked skyward, waved his arm in an ingathering gesture, and asked for "my good friend, Ron Reagan, to come down and bring Nancy." (A wire reporter called that "a friendship that was one day old." Reagan had told the *New York Times* in an interview that morning that Ford had won only because of manipulation in "the machine states," blamed "party bossism," and said, "There's no place in America for some of the things we saw happen to us.")

Reagan responded with an embarrassed grin. He pursed his lips, stood, and blew a little kiss as Nancy raised her left hand in acknowledgment. He smiled shyly, reluctance written in every gesture. The "We want Reagan!" chants were, if possible, louder than any that had come before. Again and again, he lowered his palms as a signal for his adorers to sit down, or raised a finger to his lips in a *Shhhhh*, but the chant became "Speech! Speech!" Michael Reagan said the din "seemed to last an hour. The pianist must have played 'California, Here I Come' a dozen times." ABC's Frank Reynolds, who'd grown close to the Reagans covering the campaign, was in tears.

Next, one of the party's most universally respected old men, Bryce Harlow, a White House hand going back to Eisenhower, took the podium from Ford to beg for Reagan's presence. Clearly now there was no way he could refuse. Nancy Reagan recollected for a documentary camera that Reagan's words to her when he finally made his way out of the box were "I haven't the foggiest idea of what I'm going to say!" Which is to say, it was a surprise to everyone, an improvisation, this spectacle of Ford granting Reagan this opportunity to speak. Elizabeth Drew reported in authoritative tones: "The President's aides were reluctant to have him do so, in order to make sure that Reagan did not cause the President to suffer by contrast." And as Mr. and Mrs. Reagan finally completed the long odyssey from skybox to stage, the cheers indeed seemed so much louder than the ones that had come before for Ford.

Reagan took his place behind the speaker's stand with the presidential seal affixed; now his face was all radiance, the president behind him, Betty in yellow to his left, and Nancy in a white sweater-dress trimmed in black, gazing adoringly up at him.

And after the polite pleasantries ("Ladies and gentlemen—I am going to say 'fellow Republicans' here, but those of you who are watching from a distance, all of those millions of Democrats and independents who I know are looking for a cause around which to rally and which I believe we can give them . . ."), he bragged about the party platform: "There are cynics who say that a party platform is something that no

one bothers to read and it doesn't often amount to much. Whether it is different this time than it has ever been before, I believe the Republican Party has a platform that is a banner of bold, unmistakable colors with no pastel shades."

It echoed something he'd said in early 1975 at the Conservative Political Action Conference, the one that had rung with calls for a third party with Reagan at its head—"Is it a third party we need, or is it a third and revitalized second party, raising a banner of no pale pastels, but bold colors which could make it unmistakably clear where we stand on all the issues troubling the people?" That got a massive ovation. And since that no-pale-pastels platform was more his, some said, than Ford's, it sounded like some kind of declaration of victory—a declaration that it was he, and his minions, who had delivered the nation this newly revitalized Republican Party.

He said it revealed "to the American people the difference between this platform and the platform of the opposing party, which is nothing but a revamp, and a reissue, and a running of a late, late show of the thing that we've been hearing from them for the last forty years." And his audience once more exploded.

Then he launched into a story. It was lovely—amazing, really. Even more amazing given all the evidence that he was apparently spinning this all out on the fly:

I had an assignment the other day. Someone asked me to write a letter for a time capsule that is going to be opened in Los Angeles a hundred years from now, on our Tricentennial.

It sounded like an easy assignment. They suggested I write something about the problems and issues of the day. And I said I could do so. Riding down the coast in an automobile, looking at the blue Pacific on one side and the Santa Ynez Mountains on the other, and I couldn't help but wonder if it was going to be that beautiful a hundred years from now as it was on that summer day.

Then, as I tried to write—let your own minds turn to that task: you're going to write for people a hundred years from now who know all about us, we know nothing about them; we don't know what kind of a world they'll be living in.

And suddenly I thought to myself as I wrote of the problems: they'll be the domestic problems of which the President spoke here tonight; the challenges confronting us—the erosion of freedom that has taken place under Democrat rule in this country; the invasion of private rights; the controls and restrictions on the vitality of the

great free economy that we enjoy. These are our challenges that we must meet.

And then again there is that challenge of which he spoke, that we live in a world in which the great powers have poised and aimed at each other horrible missiles of destruction—

One of the network broadcasts cut to a shot from the floor, and a man with his mouth hanging a little bit open, as if in religious awe. The gathering at long last was all silent—a congregation, like Madison Square Garden when Daddy King preached.

—nuclear weapons that can in a matter of minutes arrive in each other's country and destroy, virtually, the civilized world we live in. And suddenly it dawned on me—

(A woman clasping her hands, as if in prayer. A young blond woman, arms folded, looking soulfully down to the ground, another looking up, as if scanning the sky.)

—those who would read this letter a hundred years from now will know whether those missiles were fired. They will know whether we met our challenge.

His words took on a cadence like the Gettysburg Address ("The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here..."):

Whether they had the freedom that we have known up until now will depend on what we do here.

Will they look back with appreciation and say, thank God for those people in 1976 who headed off that loss of freedom, who kept us now a hundred years later free, who kept our world from nuclear destruction? And if we fail, they probably won't get to read the letter at all because it spoke of individual freedom and they won't be allowed to talk of that or read it.

(A line of delegates holding hands, gauzy-eyed, like people in church.)

This is our challenge. And this is why we are here in this hall tonight. Better than we've ever done before, we've got to quit talking to each other and about each other and go out and communicate to

the world that we may be fewer in numbers than we've ever been, but we carry the message they've been waiting for.
We must go forth from here united, determined that what a great general said a few years ago was true: there is no substitute for victory.

Then began an enormous ovation. "Mr. President," he started saying—then stopped. Some thought he was about to address nice things directly to Mr. President; others that he was about to address nice things to the audience. "There is no substitute for victory" had been intended, aggressively, toward Mr. President. In any event he knew to leave well enough alone. Delegates were standing on their chairs, waving Reagan placards, openly weeping. Nobody noticed anyone weeping when Gerald Ford spoke.

The two men faced each other, clasped hands—you could just overhear Ford saying, "Great job"—then they faced the audience, arms raised together. Reagan worked the line of dignitaries behind him—Nelson Rockefeller reached for Reagan's hand and said a single word: "Beautiful"—as the band struck up a brassy "The Victors," as if this were Gerald Ford's moment, which it most decidedly was not. A camera cut to two women holding a yellow hand-lettered sign—maybe hand-lettered during the speech: MR PRESIDENT USA NEEDS REAGAN SEC OF STATE. And of fists pumping enthusiastically beneath blue FORD AND DOLE signs, the official ones provided for delegates beneath their chairs. Another improvised banner: THANKS GOV & NANCY REAGAN. Reporters scrawling: Elizabeth Drew wrote that Reagan spoke "more effectively than I ever before heard him speak." She spoke for the consensus of reporters—awed at how Reagan could pull together such inspiring remarks on the fly.

Posterity, for the most part, chose to record just how spontaneous those remarks were. A historian who published a book on Reagan's 1976 campaign and gave an entire chapter to the time-capsule speech, for instance, recorded that "Reagan was utterly content to watch the proceedings with Nancy, sign a few autographs, and savor the rousing reception he had received earlier. . . . [A] very intoxicated RNC aide had come to Reagan's skybox and asked Mike Deaver to please ask Reagan once again to reconsider the invitation to speak to the convention. But the aide was summarily dismissed." Then Reagan changed his mind at the last minute, and decided to speak.

It made for a very good story.

VIC GOLD, THE POLITICAL PUBLIC RELATIONS EXPERT, A SARDONIC DEBUNKER, the guy who knew all the backstage magicians and lived to expose their bags of tricks, wrote in a book he published the next year, *PR as in President*, about the meeting that took place between Reagan and Ford the Monday evening of the convention, where the governor accepted the president's invitation to speak to the convention that Thursday night. Which is to say the speech was never spontaneous at all. "Carruthers' problem"—Bill Carruthers, the Ford campaign's stage-management wizard—"was where to fit the Reagan speech into his closing night ceremonies."

Gold noted: Carruthers and the other members of the President's PR team envied the dramatic success that Bob Strauss and Jimmy Carter achieved following Carter's acceptance speech at Madison Square Garden. The Democrats had first brought all elements of their party to the platform in an audiovisual smorgasbord of milling unity. Then followed "Daddy" King's moving benediction, to bring the convention to a final ovation. Contrary to traditional PR wisdom which dictates, *Never risk topping your candidate*, King's prayer-speech enhanced rather than detracted from Carter's acceptance. Carruthers wanted a similar all-factions smorgasbord for his closing night platform, with network cameras focused on a Republican Party unified behind Jerry Ford. Carruthers' solution was a stroke in unorthodox convention scheduling. He decided to cast Reagan as the "Daddy" King of the Republican convention.

Gold also noted a nerve-racking glitch, one that spoke to how stealthily the plan went down: John Rhodes, not in on the secret, called for Reagan to come to the podium *before* Ford's speech, during the demonstration that erupted at his entrance. Reagan stalled, telling an interviewer, "This isn't my night. It's the President's night," and managed to refuse. (Vic Gold: "Thank God, Carruthers is thinking, that at least we've got a losing candidate who knows how to follow a script.")

Ronald Reagan's gift: If a camera was present, he was aware of it—aware, always, of the gaze of others, reflecting it, adjusting himself to it, inviting it. Modeling himself, in his mind's eye, according to how he presented himself physically to others. Adjusting himself to be seen as he wished others to see him. Simultaneously maintaining an image as a VIP and an ordinary guy, always making others feel good in his

presence—his most exquisitely cultivated skill. His wife, too, with iron political discipline, she preserved the secret forevermore. No one noticed Gold's book; or if they did, they didn't care. Teflon.

Once, in 1966, when Reagan was running for the Republican gubernatorial nomination, his opponent, George Christopher, the highly favored candidate of the party establishment, thought he'd devised a clinching campaign strategy. Reagan was harvesting voters by the bushelful going up and down the state decrying the student strikes to change the rules at Berkeley. But what about Reagan's rank hypocrisy? So Christopher related Reagan's days as "a student at Eureka College, Illinois . . . leading a student uprising against the rules of his own college." And what of Reagan the stout anti-Communist? Pressed Christopher, "Did he jointly sponsor protest on U.S. atomic policies with the chairman of the Communist Party in Los Angeles"—indeed he had—"and how long did this association last?"

A fat lot of good that did. Reagan flicked the charges away by huffing about how his candidate was breaking the California Republican Party's unofficial "Eleventh Commandment," *Thou shalt not speak ill of another Republican*—which had been of course been promulgated by a party chairman who was secretly on the payroll of Reagan's campaign.

People want to believe. Ronald Reagan was able to make people believe.

Though not enough, apparently. Theatrics might have gotten him this far. But this was the end of the road: he could not travel any further. There were still certain political facts of life no amount of political hocus-pocus could obscure. "At sixty-five years of age," the *New York Times* noted, he was "too old to consider seriously another run at the Presidency."